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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ADDIS ABABA 002776

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AF FOR A/S FRAZER AND DAS YAMAMOTO

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SUBJECT: PM MELES: ETHIOPIA PREPARING TO GO AGAINST CIC IN
NOVEMBER IF NO APPROVAL OF IGAD BATTALION

REF: ADDIS ABABA 2763

Classified By: CHARGE VICKI HUDDLESTON FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

11. (C) Summary. Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles Zenawi told Business Executives for National Security (BENS) President and CEO General Charles Boyd, U.S. Air Force (Ret.), CJTF-HOA Commander Rear Admiral Richard Hunt, and Charge October 13 that he sees a UN-supported IGAD/Ugandan battalion stationed in Baidoa and a lifting of the arms embargo to shore up the TFG as the solution to containing the Union of Islamic Courts (UIC) and stopping their march to consolidate power throughout Somalia by defeating the Transitional Federal Government (TFG), and absorbing via subversion and force of arms Puntland and Somaliland. Meles said that an IGAD Ugandan battalion would focus on providing security in Baidoa. This would allow Ethiopia to train TFG troops, thereby reinforcing the TFG so that the UIC would be forced to hold meaningful talks with them. Absent of an international solution, Meles explained that Ethiopia envisions confronting the UIC in a major battle in order to damage and disgrace them, and thereby stop their advance and encourage division within the CIC. Meles indicated, however, that he would prefer an international solution and therefore will wait for the United Nation's Security Council to deliberate the lifting of the arms embargo and the IGAD/Ugandan battalion. If approval is not forthcoming then Ethiopia will move to contain the UIC sometime in November. Meles said that he will continue to work with the United States and United Kingdom and keep the two countries informed about Ethiopia's intentions. Comment: Meles hopes that by telling us and the UK of his military plans, we will move to avert the confrontation by pushing through a UNSC resolution. According to AU Deputy Mazemhaka, there is no arms embargo on the TFG and therefore it does not have to be lifted. However, the AU and indeed the international community want UN approval for lifting the embargo and the IGAD battalion. Endorsement of these concepts via the Somali Contact Group and other international fora will also be useful. End Summary.

12. (C) The meeting with the Prime Minister was also attended by MFA Acting Director of Europe and North America Desk Almaz Amha and the remainder of the BENS delegation, including Marbill Management General Partner Bill Campbell, Access Industries Executive Vice President Peter Thoren, Arnold and Porter Partner Ramon Marks, The White Oak Group Managing Partner Chris Melton, Wachovia Corporation Senior Executive Vice President and General Counsel Mark Treanor, Boies and McInnis Partner Mary Boies, BENS Senior Vice President Eric Flanning, Associated Press East Africa Bureau Chief Chris Tomlinson, and Bennett McCutcheon Michele Hughes from Joint Forces Command. The Ambassador's special assistant served as

notetaker. This message was not cleared by General Boyd.

MELES PAINTS A PICTURE

13. (C) General Boyd asked Meles how the United Nation's "reluctance to move in an effective way" and the African Union's "inability to move quickly" to deploy an IGAD force affected Ethiopia's military strategy vis-a-vis Somalia. Meles explained that any policy on Somalia has to reflect the forces involved in the conflict. He boiled the players down to two sides: the Union of Islamic Courts (UIC) and those who oppose the UIC, indicating that the Transitional Federal Government (TFG), Puntland, and Somaliland are the primary forces of opposition. Meles said the TFG's strongest assets are that its transitional charter has the support of most of the clans and that it has been recognized internationally by the United Nations and the African Union. He added that the TFG suffers, however, from an inability to protect itself and lack of cohesion amongst government officials. Meles explained that Puntland has strong ties to the TFG because the current TFG President established Puntland and that it opposes the UIC because it's "uncomfortable" with the clans in Mogadishu. Similarly, Somaliland's support of the TFG stems from its desire to remain independent. Meles said that the transitional charter, not necessarily the TFG, is the future of Somalia.

14. (C) Meles continued by explaining the how the UIC gained influence and eventually become large and powerful enough to launch its campaign against the TFG. Meles said that regional Islamic courts were originally formed to protect against predatory warlords and gained support of locals by proving responsive to law and order issues. Islamic courts,

ADDIS ABAB 00002776 002 OF 003

he noted, were not organized as one entity rather individual units established by different clans/sub-clans. He said the Islamic courts were initially parochial in nature, not ideological. The Islamic courts began to change into a more cohesive and aspiring organization once "global Islamic" movements linked to Osama bin Laden and other violent sects were invited to infiltrate its ranks. Meles said that these global Islamic movements are comprised of two major groups: the Saudi-influenced Wahabists and Egyptian-influenced Sufis. Meles said that Islamic courts ceded leadership positions to members of these Islamic movements because they provided "enlightened" leaders, experience in establishing networks, and financial support. Meles noted that Somalia's characteristic clan and sub-clan structure is still paramount and its relationship with these external Islamic groups could be a source of contention within the UIC structure.

15. (C) In addition to support from Islamic groups outside of Somalia, Meles said that Eritrea continues to align itself with the UIC. He explained that while Eritrea is not naturally inclined to side with an Islamic-based movement like the UIC, it understands that Islamists in Somalia could serve to destabilize Ethiopia. Meles added that Eritrea provides military training, equipment and support to the UIC as well as to dissident groups within Ethiopia, such as AIAI, Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) and Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF). Eritrea, Meles noted, is allied with Islamist groups for geo-political reasons rather than ideological. Meles mentioned that Iran was nominally supporting the UIC but it's involvement was limited because Iranians are Shia and Somalis Sunni. Meles said that Libya, too, was likely supporting the UIC but its involvement was difficult to gauge as it might be attempting to undermine the Wahabis.

16. (C) Given the loose and various entities comprised to makeup the UIC, Meles asked what was keeping the alliance together. He said the primary reason is the UIC is seen as successful and this has created momentum that must be broken. Given the two different groups that make up the UIC there could be a break - if the UIC suffered a defeat - between the

clan based courts and the ideologues like Aweys who control the leadership because they control the resources from abroad. The UIC's success also is a result of the TFG's organizational weakness and "feeble" military. Additionally, although Somaliland has a common interest in fighting radical Islamists, the TFG's unwillingness to recognize its independence limits Somaliland's commitment. Puntland the home of President Youssef is Youssef's refuge should the TFG fall so it will not initiate but defend itself. Meles argued that the international community must assist in reinforcing the TFG both by building leadership and military capacity as it was created by the region and the international community. By shoring up the TFG it can serve as the vehicle for the formation of a more representative government. But this can not happen unless the TFG is seen as a serious entity by the UIC as it will not seriously negotiate with a weak TFG. Ethiopia also encourages greater support and commitment from Puntland, Somaliland, the African Union and the international community to the TFG. The UIC may ride its momentum to complete a country-wide victory if "someone from the outside" does not intervene.

MELES WILL WAIT FOR UN ACTION

17. (C) Meles told the group that he sees a UN-supported IGAD/Ugandan force and a lifting of the arms embargo to shore up the TFG as the best solution. Meles said that an IGAD force could focus on training the TFG military, halt the spread of the UIC and open meaningful dialogue between the two parties. Absent of an international solution, Meles explained that Ethiopia is prepared to do battle with the UIC in Somalia. Meles indicated that before making a final decision he will wait for the November United Nation's Security Council meeting where he hopes a favorable will be made to lift the arms embargo and deploy the IGAD/Ugandan battalion. Meles said that he will continue to work with the United States and United Kingdom and keep the two countries informed about Ethiopia's intentions.

18. (C) CJTF-HOA Admiral Hunt asked if the Prime Minister was certain that Ethiopia would win in a confrontation with the UIC. Meles said that while the UIC army may have had its way with disorganized warlords, it is no match for the skilled and professionalized Ethiopian military. Meles explained that the ENDF (Ethiopian National Defense Forces) would move

ADDIS ABAB 00002776 003 OF 003

quickly to "break the back" of the UIC. Meles envisioned that his army would not take Mogadishu, rather it would confront the UIC close to the border, allowing the Somalis themselves to confront or break away from the UIC. He said that the operation would likely consist of infantry and mechanized forces rather than air assets. Meles noted that the UIC is likely armed with hand-held surface to air missiles, RPGs and low quality Russian anti-tank missiles provided by Eritrea, but not with advanced anti-armor capability as Eritrea did not share this technology. Meles said that the ENDF could chose a large battle so that the UIC would be sufficiently wounded and this would then result in their retreat to Mogadishu. Meles said, TFG force would fight on the front lines and Ethiopian troops were serve merely as a "stiffening backbone." Meles added that the operation would not require a redeployment or movement of troops away from the Eritrean border. Given Ethiopia's previous military operations in Somalia in 1996 and 1999, Meles emphasized his Government has long prepared for "one and half wars" and is ready and capable of handling conflicts on two fronts.

19. (C) Meles acknowledged that there will be consequences to any Ethiopian military operation in Somalia. In addition to "disquiet" from the international community, Meles said that Ethiopia would likely move up on the priority list of the enemies of Islam, thereby becoming more of a target for Islamic terrorist activities. Meles argued that "hard-core

Islamists" have always thought of Ethiopia as being in the "Crusader" camp, so drawing the ire of Islamists will be nothing new. But, the conflict could devolve into a Christianity versus Islam scenario, warned Meles. For this reason, Meles reiterated that his preference was for an international solution to the situation.

MELES ON INSURGENCIES AND DEMOCRATIZATION

¶10. (C) In response to a question about Somalia's impact on Ethiopia's internal situation, Meles said Eritrea is promoting insurgencies within the country, but Ethiopians are not ready to pickup arms. Meles acknowledged that his government has problems with people in the urban areas of Ethiopia, but points to his party's support in rural areas as the real base of support. Though, Meles noted, pastoralist areas in the Somali region have been problematic for the government as development programs have not moved at a fast enough pace. Meles indicated that his approach to working in the Somali region have changed. According the Meles, the government had previously tried to work solely with "modern" leaders while ignoring more "traditional" leaders, like clan elders. Meles said that the government is trying to correct this mistake and work with both groups.

¶11. (C) When pushed by the BENS delegation to defend Ethiopia's commitment to democracy and rule of law, Meles said that democratization and rule of law are critical to the continued stability of the country. He added that adequate opportunity for peaceful dissent was a top priority. He argued that progress on both democratization and rule of law was a "matter of survival" and the "only option" for Ethiopia.

HUDDLESTON